

Our Kind of Traitor

John LeCarré (New York: Viking Books, 2010), 320 pp.

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With *Our Kind of Traitor* John LeCarré continues his best-selling series of spy novels set in the post-Cold War era, this time pitting a richly drawn cast—intelligence professionals and earnest, co-opted amateurs—against the corrosive tentacles and limitless resources of present-day Russian criminal syndicates. The tale benefits from the mainstays of LeCarré's narrative style—quickly sketched yet, upon reflection, somehow fully realized characters, and an insider's knowing, evocative, occasionally poetic sense of the story's various locales.

Perry Makepiece, on the cusp of a brilliant Oxford teaching career, is vacationing in the Caribbean with his beautiful partner, Gail Perkins, herself a young, rising star attorney in London's judicial bureaucracy. Coincidence places Perry in a friendly tennis match with a character introduced simply as Dima, a diminutive yet hauntingly imposing Russian, equipped with dictatorial, albeit disarmingly charming social graces, and festooned with a ragtag extended family with near comic eccentricities.

During this chance encounter, Dima—sensing his and his family's vulnerability in the wake of a Russian mafia reorganization that renders him lethally expendable, and hoping to trade knowledge for refuge—makes a predator's snapshot appraisal of Perry and Gail and decides to use them as go-betweens with British intelligence. Dima's plea for help follows hard upon the tennis match, and Perry and Gail sense adventure and import beyond the classroom and cloakroom. They reach out to British intelligence officials and connect with Hector Meriduth, a close-to-retirement and marginalized senior spy manager, who judges Dima's

offer to be a career-redeeming, last big operation. He takes Perry and Gail under his wing and shepherds them through the tactical hurdles and moral questions that complicate the path to Dima's safe reception and the anticipated intelligence windfall. Hector's number two in the operation is Luke, a just-past-midcareer officer whose personal missteps and unfocused appraisal of his own professional worth have him quickly throwing in with Hector in another off-the-cuff stab at redemption.

The ensuing action is quick-paced and taut. The extraction of Dima from a Russian mafia convention—most likely his intended execution site—shows LeCarré's facility at switching gears from a leisurely paced narrative to shocking, unexpected violence. LeCarré's palette is fully brought to bear in the sharply contrasted tennis arenas of an exotic yet casual Antigua and an overly formal Roland Garros Stadium during the French Open, and in a nerve-testing moonlit getaway drive through treacherous Alpine passes. These scenes display the author at his engrossing, beyond-the-travelogue best.

The novel's ending is abrupt and touches on several familiar LeCarré themes. Dedication to mission, commitment to personal loyalty and partnership, and determination to expose both truth and corrupt wrongdoing are all unashamedly celebrated. But to what end? Are these arguably ennobling strivings—bedrock verities of the intelligence world—doomed to be defeated by chance, personal shortcomings, or overarching malignancies unrecognized until they strike? In the author's lengthy and gratefully ongoing espionage universe, those questions can only be answered by his characters as they

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move past their shared adventure—and further pondered by the many intelligence profession-

als among LeCarré's legion of appreciative readers.

